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Rumsfeld's Enforcer: The Secret World of Stephen Cambone

By Jeffrey St. Clair

The cold fellow in the business suit sitting between two uniformed generals at the witness table during the senate hearings on the Taguba report about abuse of Iraqi prisoners of war was Dr. Stephen Cambone, the undersecretary of defense for intelligence, known throughout the Pentagon as Donald Rumsfeld's "chief henchman". In his testimony before the committee, Cambone was unapologetic and almost as dismissive as the ridiculous Sen. James Inhofe about global disgust over the abuse and murder of Iraqi prisoners of war. Cambone, an apex neo-con and veteran of the Project for the New American Century, evinced disdain not only for the senatorial inquiry but also at a squeamish Lieutenant General Antonio Taguba, who sat next him, looking as if he suspected that he might well be the next one leashed to Cambone's bureaucratic pillory.

A Republican staffer on the Senate foreign relations Committee tells CounterPunch the little-known Cambone, who like so many others on the Bush war team skillfully avoided military service, has quietly become one of the most powerful men in the Pentagon, rivaling even Paul Wolfowitz. "Cambone is a truly dangerous player", the staffer said. "He is Rumsfeld's guard dog, implacably loyal. While Wolfowitz positions himself to step into the top spot should Rumsfeld get axed, Cambone has dug in and gone to war against the insurgents in the Pentagon. Cambone's fingerprints are all over the occupation and the interrogation scandal. For him, there's no turning back".

(**Cambone** *continued on page 4)*

A Nuke, Pawnshops and Real Estate Agents

The Empire, Seen from Oceanside

By ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Head south from Los Angeles on Interstate 5 and the only respite from the houses and subdivisions and trailer parks marching down the Pacific coastline comes with the thousands of acres of the US Marine Corps training base at Camp Pendleton, and the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (tastefully labeled SONGS on Southern California Edison's signs). Protected by the Marines and the graceful twin domes of the nuclear plant, nature survives on the coastal bluffs above the beaches.

If the empire's forward outpost is currently in Baghdad, surely the valley bottoms, mesas and shoreline of San Diego county, guarded on its northern edge by Camp Pendleton, offer a useful clues as to how power and privilege work in the imperial homeland. Looking beyond the laconic surfers lining up at dawn at Old Man's at San Onofre, and at the sightseekers swarming into Legoland we see a diorama of speculation, hyper-charged suburban development, dislocation and skyrocketing household debt.

Oceanside is an unpretentious little city south of Camp Pendleton, visibly grateful to its military customers whose bulky forms and shaven heads crammed my motel, as well as restaurants such as Rockin' Baja Lobster and Joe's Crab Shack, down in the marina. Signs proclaim support for the troops along with easy finance terms for underpaid servicemen and women. There are dollar drafts in the bars and you can idle your motorcycle downtown without getting hassled. A couple of miles further south the car lots suddenly give way to the manicured medians and rehabbed wetlands of Carlsbad.

You don't have to drive more than a couple of blocks through Oceanside's main drag before the economic realities underpinning Empire become apparent. On the south side of the 4000 block on Pacific Coast Highway is a colorful store front with two big signs shouting "We Support Our Troops" and "Welcome Home Heroes". But the biggest sign of all says "PAYDAY ADVANCE". The other side of the road there's a pawnshop, one of several in Oceanside, and there are several other store fronts offering advance loans for Marines who can't make it to the end of the month. Being poor in America – a reality for millions who might once have called themselves middle class – means having to face debts each month, without any decent financial services and hence dealing with interest rates of around 20 per cent.

Though Oceanside is dowdy in comparison with Carlsbad it's still a rich target of opportunity for San Diego's insatiable real estate investors. North county makes a mockery of the once venerated idea that the average American would own a home and use that as a primary store of wealth. This dream, enshrined in the only big tax break offered the middle class, the home mortgage, looks like the remotest of fantasies in San Diego county where 88 per cent of the population cannot afford to buy a median-price home.

In a society whose overseas interests are guarded by those marines borrowing against payday, wealth has risen to the

(**Oceanside** *continued on page 6)*

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"We Only Want to Hurt the Westerners. Where can We Find them?"

Raid on the Saudi Oil Industry

By Patrick Cockburn

Baghdad

It was the latest in a series of ruthless attacks on foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, targeting the employees of foreign oil companies. In each case the gunmen have aimed to slaughter as many non-Muslims as possible.

At 7.30 on Saturday morning, May 31, they chose the city of Khobar, an important hub of the Saudi oil industry. As many as seven gunmen wearing military-style uniforms opened fire at the Al-Khobar Petroleum Centre building, which houses offices of western oil companies in the Gulf city. They also sprayed with gunfire an oil industry compound containing offices and apartments of the Arab Petroleum Investment Corporation (Apicorp). Three of its employees and the son of another - a 10-year-old Egyptian boy on a school bus - were killed.

Michael Hamilton, a British manager at Apicorp, was shot dead in his black saloon. His mobile phone was left on the front seat as his bloodied body was tied to a car by the gunmen and dragged through the streets before it was dumped near a bridge. It had chilling echoes of an incident at the beginning of the month when the body of an American was dragged through Yanbu, a Saudi city on the Red Sea, in an attack by five militants on a petrochemical facility. The events surrounding the initial attack in Khobar are confused. But if, as suspected, al-Qa'ida is involved then it has returned to the area where - a few miles away in Dhahran - in 1996 it set off bombs to destroy a US military compound, killing 19 American soldiers.

After the shootings at the two compounds the gunmen fled to the Oasis Residential Resorts. There, they seized between 45 and 60 hostages in a walled-off district which houses executives and is too expensive for ordinary oil workers to live in. It contains restaurants, an ice rink, spas, swimming pools a pastry shop and gardens. It also has 200 villas, 48 apartments, 195 studio apartments as well as a hotel and luxury apartments.

Security companies recommend foreigners to live in such places, which are considered more secure and where vehicles entering can be checked. But the existence of these compounds also provides convenient targets for groups that want to kill foreigners.

Once the gunmen had taken over Oasis, they started to hunt down non-Muslims to kill or take hostage. Abu Hashem, 45, an Iraqi-American engineer, was leaving for work when he heard the sound of gunfire. He went back home and took his wife and two children to a neighbour's house for safety. Abu Hashem noticed that there were blood stains on the floor of his house and went looking for security guards. Instead he found four Saudi men with short beards and whose ages he said were between 18 and 25.

A revealing conversation followed. Abu Hashem asked the men: "Are you guards?" They said they were and asked him if he was a Muslim. When he said he was they said: "Give us proof." Abu Hashem knew they could not be regular security guards and took out his identity papers which showed he was a Muslim but also revealed that he was an American of Iraqi origins. When the gunmen said he was an American, Abu Hashem said this was true but he was an American Muslim. To his relief they said, "we do not kill Muslims" and politely apologised for breaking into his home. They then lectured him on Islam and told him: "We are defending our country and we want to take it from the non-believers" - probably a reference to the royal family of Saudi Arabia. Another Muslim resident, Salam al-Hakawati, 38, a Lebanese corporate finance official, hid with his wife and two-year-old son upstairs when they heard gunfire. He heard people searching rooms downstairs and saying "this is a Muslim house" when they saw Koranic verses. A man with a machine gun came upstairs and said to him in Arabic: "We only want to hurt Westerners and Americans. Can you tell us where we can find them here?"

By now gunmen had killed at least 16, including Mr Hamilton, an American and an Italian cook. The Saudi security forces stormed the Oasis compound, a walled complex, and surrounded the attackers on the sixth floor of a high-rise building. During the night they tried to rescue hostages but retreated when they found booby traps. At night the gunmen also started to kill hostages, who are by now said to have numbered 25.

One of those who survived, a Jordanian computer engineer, Nijar Hijazin, said: "The nine had their throats cut by the kidnappers when they tried to escape at night by the stairs."

At no time did the hostage-takers ask to negotiate according to Jamal Khashoggi, a media adviser to the Saudi Arabian ambassador to London. He said: "They didn't have any demands, they just started killing people." He said that the nine hostages who were killed were in addition to the 16. The Saudi authorities say it was the killing of hostages which led to the decision to storm the building. Saudi newspapers said that one

(**Oil Raid** *continued on page 6)*

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You Call This a Choice?

Kerry and Those Anti-Abortion Judges

By Brandy Baker

On May 19, 2004, John Kerry told the Associated Press that he was open to the idea of appointing anti-abortion judges "as long as it doesn't lead to the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade".

All hell would have broken loose if Ralph Nader said something like this. The leaders of the feminist movement were ready to tar, feather, and run Nader out of DC when he blundered and proposed that if Roe V. Wade were overturned, abortion would be protected because the decision would go back to the states.

But Elizabeth Cavendish, Interim President of NARAL Pro-Choice America has only this to say about Kerry's statements: "There's a huge difference between Bush and Kerry on choice and this is not going to undermine the pages-long documentation that Kerry is pro-choice."

Yes, Nader was wrong to say what he said in 2000, and no, he is not perfect, but what many do not know (and what the mainstream feminist movement will not tell you) is that Ralph Nader signed to NOW's platform of political, social, and economic rights for women. As of early June Kerry had not. And not long before Kerry told all of us that he was no redistribution Democrat, Nader spoke up for cleaning people: a segment of the workforce that is overrepresented by women and people of color. Cleaning people only are noticed if someone is unhappy with their work.

The problem is that we have a single issue women's movement that is not equipped to address the collective oppression of women who are on the lower rungs of the economic ladder because the movement restrains itself with blind support for the Democratic Party. Ralph Nader knows that abortion is not the only concern of the majority of this country's women, which is why he will stick up for those who clean the houses of the limousine liberals who are campaigning the hardest for Kerry.

Despite the fact that we won Roe V. Wade under the anti-choice Nixon administration and we did not have abortion providers in over 85 per cent of all counties under Clinton, many see a Democratic Party presidency as vital to securing abortion rights.

Kerry's statements killed the myth we are guaranteed pro-abortion judges if he becomes president; it also kills the other argument that the Anyone But Bush crowd has been promoting: the one that claims that we can build a movement after we get a Democrat in office and that Democrat will do all of the right stuff. John Kerry said that he would be open to appointing anti-abortion judges to the Supreme Court only 24 days after what many have said was one of the largest demonstrations in American history – the March for Women's Lives. Movements work, but the two party system does not.

Kerry's statements killed the myth we are guaranteed pro-abortion judges if he becomes president.

Like Nader, the feminist movement itself was once on the receiving end of invective about being splitters. In the summer of 1989, NOW delegates who were disgusted with the Democrats proposed an exploratory committee to discuss the possibility of launching a third party that would not only speak to specific women's issues, but would address militarism, racism, and poverty. After the media, which usually ignored NOW, castigated them for daring to toy with such an idea, feminist leaders publicly distanced themselves from the proposal. Again in 1992 NOW briefly considered the idea of forming a third party.

The Supreme Court passed Roe V. Wade in 1974 during the Nixon administration; the decision was written by Justice Harry Blackmun, a Nixon appointee. Nixon, an anti-choice right winger, was a war criminal, but when it came to domestic policy, he was this country's last progressive president.

Now, Nixon was not a warm person known for his compassion but there was a movement that was on the ground, and it was not made up of politicians and lobbyists. It was comprised of people like the single women that the Democrats are trying to chase to the polls this November.

All of the present Republican and Democratic senators voted for Scalia (including John Kerry): 98 out of 100. The two absentees were Republicans. Eleven Democrats voted for Clarence Thomas (52-48) in a then-Democratically controlled Senate. California, under Governor Ronald Reagan, was the first state to have legal abortions. Public support for the death penalty dropped: that has been reflected in this current conservative Supreme Court's decision to ban executions of retarded people. This conservative court also upheld affirmative action policies in college admission and overturned the law that made sodomy in Texas illegal.

If the definition of feminism is the end to sexism, then frankly, this mode of thinking is anti-feminist. If I divorce a man because he was taking my money and denying me my basic rights, I cannot see any of these women telling me to marry one of his brothers, yet after eight years of Clinton, that is what the mainstream feminist movement wanted us to do, and they want us to do it now in 2004. CP

Brandy Baker lives in Baltimore. She is a contributor to CounterPunch's forthcoming book, Dime's Worth of Difference.

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(**Cambone** *continued from page 1)*

Cambone has stealthily positioned himself as the most powerful intelligence operator in the Bush administration. On May 8, 2003, Rumsfeld named him Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, a new position which Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz described thus: "The new office is in charge of all intelligence and intelligence-related oversight and policy guidance functions". In practice, this means that Cambone controls the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, the National Reconnaissance Organization, the National Security Agency, the Defense Security Service and Pentagon's Counter-Intelligence Field Activity. Cambone meets with the heads of these agencies, as well as top officials at the CIA and National Security Council twice a week to give them their marching orders.

One senate staffer tells us he has more operational sway than George Tenet or Condi Rice. His rise to power has been quiet, almost unnoticed until the Abu Ghraib scandal forced him briefly into the spotlight. Indeed, prior to the events of May, Cambone completely evaded detection by Bob Woodward, who in two thick volumes on Bush's wars failed to mention the name Cambone once. Of course, this may reveal more about Woodward than Cambone's skill at bureaucratic camouflage.

Yes, Cambone has neo-con credentials. He got his masters and doctorate at Claremont College in southern California, an elite Straussian enclave. He went on to draft sections of the Project for a New American Century's 2001 Report, Rebuilding America's Defenses, a document notable for recommending that the US develop race-based weapons. But more crucial for the speedy trajectory of his career is Cambone's resume as a devout Rumsfeldian. In 1998, Rumsfeld selected Cambone to serve as staff director of the Rumsfeld Commission on Ballistic Missile Defense, the Congressionally-appointed panel which justified implementation of the Strategic Defense Initiative on the grounds that the US was vulnerable to strikes from missiles freighting nuclear, chemical and biological weapons launched by rogue nations, such as North Korea, Iran and Iraq.

Cambone was no newcomer to the Star Wars scheme. From 1982 through 1986, he toiled at Los Alamos developing policy papers about the need for space-based weapons. In 1990, George Bush, Sr. picked Cambone to head up the Strategic Defense Initiative Office at the Pentagon. After Bush lost, Cambone migrated to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a DC holding pen for hawks, where he continued to hammer away in essays and speeches about the windows of vulnerability in the skies over America.

Rumsfeld first summoned Cambone into his inner circle not as an overlord for intelligence, but as the chief Pentagon strategist for pushing SDI through Congress. Recall that in the early days of the Bush administration, Star Wars and the obliteration of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty were the twin obsessions of the Rumsfeld gang at the Pentagon.

After 9/11 Rumsfeld moved Cambone over to work on war planning and intelligence as Deputy Secretary of Defense for Policy, where he labored under the neo-con luminary Douglas Feith. There's reason to believe that Cambone's real mission was to keep tabs on Feith, a notorious hothead and Cheney loyalist whom Rumsfeld distrusts. Rumsfeld wasn't the only one who loathed Feith. Gen. Tommy Franks, who commanded the Afghan and Iraq wars, told Woodward that Feith was "the stupidest motherfucker on the face of the Earth".

Boykin briefed Cambone on a list of no-holds-barred interrogation methods that he thought should be used to extract more information from Iraqi detainees.

Cambone and Feith reportedly soon developed an equally acrimonious relationship. But as Feith's star fell, Cambone's rose. In July 2002, Rumsfeld moved Cambone to the Office of Analysis and Evaluation, where his mission was to implement Rumsfeld's plan to reorganize the military and trim some of its most highly-prized weapons systems. "Cambone loomed as a huge threat to the generals", a senate staffer told us. "The message was pretty simple. Go along with our war plans or risk losing your big-ticket items and perhaps your command. Cambone was the enforcer". At the Pentagon, the most feared weapon isn't a dirty nuke, but a line item in the budget.

In April of 2003, Rumsfeld placed Cambone in charge of counter-terrorism teams operating under the code-name "Gray Fox". This covert operation is a kind of sabotage and assassination squad run out of the civil wing of the Pentagon. Rumsfeld had grown frustrated with the military's reluctance to assassinate suspected al-Qaeda and Iraqi resistance leaders, an understandable reluctance in light of US executive orders restricting the use of assassinations. So Rumsfeld seized control of the hit teams from the generals and assigned it to Cambone, a civilian appointee with no military experience. The Gray Fox project, so one Washington Post report concluded, is geared to perform "deep penetration" missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Syria and North Korea, setting up listening posts, conducting acts of sabotage and assassination. When questioned about Gray Fox, Cambone snapped, "We won't talk about those things".

However, military officers did talk about Gray Fox. "The people in these units are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, anywhere around the world. They are very highly trained, with specialized skills for dealing with close-quarters combat and unique situations posed by weapons of mass destruction", a military officer told Army Times. "If we find a high-value target somewhere, anywhere in the world, and if we have the forces to get there and get to them, we should get there and get to them", the official said. "Right now, there are 18 food chains, 20 levels of paperwork and 22 hoops we have to jump through before we can take action. Our enemy moves faster than that".

Aside from guarding Rumsfeld from assaults from within the Pentagon, Cambone's main role seems to be cutting through red tape and bothersome codes of conduct, such as the Geneva Conventions, to institute legally questionable policies. Take the treatment of Iraqi prisoners. The orders to soften up Iraqi prisoners for intelligence interrogators (both military and private contractors) came directly from Cambone's office.

In August 2003, as the occupation of Iraq began to turn bloody, Cambone ordered Brigadier General Geoffrey Miller, former commander of the detention facility at Guantanamo, to go to Iraq along with

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Cambone has stealthily positioned himself as the most powerful intelligence operator in the Bush administration.

a team of experienced military interrogators, who had honed their inquisitorial skills with the torture of al-Qaeda and Taliban detainees captured in Afghanistan. His instructions were to "Gitmoize" the interrogations at Abu Ghraib and other prisons, including the notorious Camp Cropper on the outskirts of the Baghdad Airport, where the Delta Force conducted abusive interrogations of top level members of Saddam's regime.

Cambone's top deputy inside the military is none other than Lt. General William Boykin, the Christian warrior, whom Cambone and Rumsfeld elevated to the position of intelligence czar for the US Army last fall. Boykin rose to this lofty eminence after he went on a revival tour of evangelical churches in Oregon, where he disclosed the top secret intelligence that the US "had been attacked because we are a Christian nation". Boykin also leaked the news that Bush's war on terrorism was actually "a war against Satan".

Boykin calmed the congregations by saying there was little reason to fear because the Christian god is mightier than Allah. "I know that my god is bigger than his", Boykin preached. "I know that my god is a real God and his an idol". The general also revealed to the faithful that the supreme deity of the Christians had hand-picked Bush to be president during these fraught times. It was obvious, the general reasoned, that Bush didn't win the election. He became president through a kind of preemptive strike by the Almighty.

When word of Boykin's sermons landed on the front page of the Los Angeles Times in October of 2003, there was outrage in the American Islamic community that this two-star zealot was now directing US military intelligence operations in the Middle East. There were calls for his ouster and the Inspector General of the Army launched an investigation of Boykin. But Rumsfeld and Cambone shrugged off the probe and stood by Boykin.

It now turns out that Boykin, the Islamophobe, played a central role in the torture scandal now gripping the Bush administration. Last summer, Boykin briefed Cambone on a list of no-holds-barred interrogation methods that he thought should be used to extract more information from Iraqi detainees.

These included humiliation, sleep deprivation, restraint, water torture, religious taunting, light deprivation, and other techniques of torture that have since come to light. A few weeks after this crucial meeting in June, Cambone sent General Miller to Iraq with instructions to oversee the implementation of the Boykin interrogation plan in order to "rapidly exploit internees for actionable intelligence". According to Lt. General Antonio Taguba, who investigated the abuses at Abu Ghraib, Miller then instructed the Military Police to become "actively engaged in setting the conditions for successful exploitation of internees". The grim trio of Cambone, Boykin and Miller also conspired to put the control of the detention facilities in Iraq under the tactical control of military intelligence. At Abu Ghraib, the job fell to Col. Thomas M. Pappas, commander of the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade, a move that Lt. General Taguba called contrary to established military doctrine.

It now seems likely that Cambone was the one to invite Israeli advice (and perhaps interrogators) on how to extract information from Iraqi detainees. Before the Abu Ghraib scandal broke, Cambone freely admitted to the Washington Times that he was taking advice from the Israelis and sharing intelligence with them on the mechanics of occupation and interrogation. "Those who have to deal with like problems tend to share information as best they can".

These days advancement through the ranks of the Pentagon often goes hand-in-hand with opportunities to deliver sweetheart deals to corporate allies. Here too Cambone has not disappointed his backers. From 1986 to 1990, Cambone worked as a top lobbyist for SRS, a murky software company with deep roots in the Pentagon and CIA. Although Cambone left SRS for government work, he didn't forget his old employers. With Cambone's approval, the Pentagon awarded SRS a $6 million contract to provide management support for the Missile Defense Agency, the wing of the Defense Department charged with managing the SDI program and the development of space-base weapons.

In addition, SRS benefited from Cambone's transfer to the spying wing of the Pentagon. an SRS subsidiary called Torch Concepts was hired by the Pentagon to conduct a data mining foray into passenger records of JetBlue airlines. Bart Edsall, SRS's vice-president, described the work Torch did this way: "the company got a contract from the Pentagon to work with the Army to ferret information out of data streams [in an effort to detect] abnormal behavior of secretive people". Sound familiar? It should. The scheme was essentially a privatized version of the kind of work that John Poindexter wanted to conduct with his discredited Total Information Awareness operation. No surprise that the contracts for this outsourced form of snooping should fall to SRS. It is already the primary private contractor working with the Information Awareness Office of DARPA, the agency which Poindexter ruled and which continues the nefarious work of prying into the private lives, including travel, health and financial records, of American citizens.

As Rumsfeld's hatchetman, Cambone has become so hated and feared inside the Pentagon that one general told the Army Times: "If I had one round left in my revolver, I'd take out Stephen Cambone".

This sentiment elevates the concept of fragging to an entirely new level. CP

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(**Oceanside** *continued from page 1)*

top of the jar, like fat in a soup can. A recent study by the U.S. General Accounting Office tells us that in 1949 no less than 47 per cent of all fiscal revenues were collected from corporations; today only 7 per cent. In San Diego county, as elsewhere, the rich can speculate, buy up real estate, use political clout to cut back on overall social services while taking exclusive advantage of that hallowed home-owners' tax shelter.

In the interests of budget balancing Gov Arnold Schwarzenegger is insisting that California musty turn away qualified students from public universities in the state. The savings this year, according to George Skelton of the Los Angeles Times, will be just $45 million, and fee hikes from the students who do get in will be $218 million, all of which is nickel and dime stuff in plugging a $14 billion deficit in a state that came to greatness by offering affordable college education to every qualified student. What Schwarzenegger won't do is raise taxes on California's very rich people, among them the two university chiefs who jointly pull in $722,000 plus vast perks.

The enlisted servicemen and women hock stuff in the pawn shops and borrow against payday. The generals and the contractors buy up beach property and own stock in the institutions that bankroll the pawnshops. The military coming home from the war face poor prospects in the service economy, only a rung or two above the farm workers handling high-value crops (ornamental flowers, tomatoes, strawberries etc) nearby. These workers often sleep in the bushes and canyons and get hunted out of their camps on the lagoons because the home owners don't like to look at them and cities, like Carlsbad have never built low income housing.

And what about job prospects for those who don't enlist? The most recent, April job figures show that despite the growth of more than 300,000 jobs last month, there are still fewer people employed than at the start of the recession, in March 2001. The figures are these: March 2001 total employment, 132.5 million; April 2004 total employment 130.9 million. That is really quite a remarkable statistic. More than two years into the recovery from the 2001 recession, the U.S. economy has not produced any net increase in jobs. It's the first time since 1949 that this normal pattern of job growth in a recovery has not occurred.

Bush's polling numbers in California have plummeted. A Field poll shows that of non-partisan and third party voters 63 per cent disapprove of his work as president and 75 per cent disagree with his handling of the war in Iraq. And Arnold Schwarzennegger, who the Republicans thought would pull the state out for Bush, is a pro-choice Rockefeller Republican who won't even give Bush a photo op.

Bush is toast unless Kerry pulls it out for him. Joke: Kerry comes into a bar, and the barkeep asks, "Why the long face?" Better joke: a horse comes into a bar, the barkeep examines both ends and says, "Gentlemen, it's an honor." There you have it, the fusion candidate. CP

(**Oil Raid** *continued from page 2)*

body had been thrown from the top of the building and others had been mutilated. Just after sunrise some 40 black-clad Saudi commandos dropped into the compound from three helicopters. There was gunfire and some 50 hostages were freed. Saudi security officials said the gunmen's leader had been arrested, two killed - several escaped.

There was confusion yesterday about the identity and the number of those killed. Nine Saudis and eight foreigners are reported to have died in the first clashes before the attackers moved to Oasis. A manager in the compound said three foreigners, including a Briton and an American, were killed in the rescue. A security source confirmed hostages had died. Others were being treated for exhaustion and dehydration.

At about the same time as the high-rise was being stormed, a man who claimed to be Abdul Aziz al-Moqrin, identified as the chief of al-Qa'ida in Saudi Arabia, claimed responsibility for the attack in a tape posted on the internet on a a website noted for militant Islamic comment. He identifies by nationality the foreigners who were killed, although he says it was an American whose body was dragged through the streets. Moqrin denounces the Saudi government for selling out to the US and providing "America with oil at the cheapest prices ... so that their economy does not collapse".

The recording may have been made inside the besieged building because it ends with volleys of shots and men shouting: "Open the door quickly." CP

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